

Police in riot gear and more than 100 bailiffs evicted dozens of travellers from an illegal campsite in Warwickshire yesterday, three years after the families moved on to the green belt land.

One site resident claimed more than 40 men, women, and children were given 20 minutes to pack up and leave after they failed in a legal bid to block their removal from the site at Bulkington.

Warwickshire Police, which sent 75 police officers to the scene including an air support unit, said four people were arrested to prevent a breach of the peace during the eviction.

Three of them were later released without charge. A fourth man, aged 44, was taken to Rugby where he remained in custody last night.

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council postponed an attempt to evict the travellers in January after barricades were put up and set on fire to hinder bailiffs.

At a High Court hearing in April, Mr Justice Collins decided the site at Wolvey Road had been unlawfully occupied.

John Lee, who had been living on the site with his wife and four children since 2001, said he had been confronted by bailiffs when he went for a morning wash.

The 45-year-old said: "I went for a wash at 7.30am and my place was surrounded by bailiffs and there was a police helicopter over the site filming everything."

"I had four children in bed, not washed, and they told us we had 20 minutes to pack up and leave."

Warwickshire Police said a cordon was erected around the land and a number of roads were

A traveller leaves his three-year-old camp in Bulkington as police officers look on

closed during the eviction operation. The council said it was working with different agencies to address potential issues of homelessness.

Julie Jackson, chairman of the planning applications committee, said: "The council has always remained committed to ending the unlawful occupation and development of the site, and restoring the land to its original green belt condition."

Meanwhile, Wychavon District Council was granted an

injunction by the High Court yesterday to evict travellers occupying a site near Pershore, Worcestershire.

But the injunction was granted on condition that the council first considered a planning application by the travellers.

The group bought the land in Eckington from a farmer in May and removed pasture to put down gravel hardstanding and fences without planning permission.

Ian Marshall, head of legal

services at Wychavon District Council, said the hearing had been a mixed result.

"We are not completely satisfied but we are at least grateful that the injunction has been granted. This will put us in a strong position in a few months' time if the planning application is rejected."

The council is also awaiting a decision by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott on the future of an illegal travellers' site at Wyre Piddle.

It follows a public hearing after the council refused planning permission for a site at Duffield Farm.

Mr Marshall said the council provided five public sites and about 70 pitches to travellers.

But he said a growing number of travellers were moving into the south Worcestershire area, causing problems for the council.

He said: "We have had several problems, it is very frustrating that the gypsies haven't really

shown much respect for the planning process."

The Government plans to introduce new legislation to combat the problem of travellers building on bought land without planning permission.

Under the new law, due to come into effect at the end of the year, local authorities will be able to use temporary stop orders to prevent further development of camps on illegal sites without having to seek permission through the courts.

